

Call for 'secret' report

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

Opposition health spokeswoman Georgie Crozier has requested a copy of a 'secret' letter that purportedly exonerated I Cook Foods on the day of its enforced closure by health authorities.

Ms Crozier told State Parliament that she lodged freedom-of-information requests for "critical correspondence" sent by Knox City Council to the state's health department on 22 February 2019.

It was allegedly sent the same day that the Dandenong South-based ICF was closed by the department as part of an investigation into a patient's death from an alleged listeria infection at Knox Private Hospital.

By the time it re-opened six weeks later, the business was destroyed. Forty-one employees lost their jobs.

"Such is the seriousness of these allegations regarding the circumstances that led to the closure of I Cook Foods, I have also written to the Chief Commissioner of Police alerting him to the FOI lodged with Knox City Council, highlighting to him the potentially critically important nature of the requested correspondence."

Ms Crozier and ICF director Ian Cook say they were approached by a person who claimed the letter asserts that the patient did not eat ICF sandwiches.

She was allegedly on a "special diet" that excluded sandwiches.

Mr Cook says he had received an "almost completely blacked-out" redacted version of the document under FOI last year.

"We always knew there was something in this report."

He said it emboldened "conspiracy theories" about why ICF was closed by the authorities.

"If they just made a terrible mistake in clos-



Ian Cook claims health authorities knew he was innocent at the time of his closure. 202497

Picture: STEWART CHAMBERS

ing us, why didn't they fix it?"

The alleged contents are at odds with State Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton's testimony to a 2020 Parliamentary inquiry into ICF's closure.

He told the inquiry that the patient was reportedly "fond of eating the sandwiches provided in hospital" – all supplied by caterer ICF.

"Whilst in hospital the patient only consumed food from the hospital, with all food provided by Knox Private Hospital's sole caterer, I Cook Foods", Professor Sutton said.

When asked about the alleged 'secret' document, a Knox City Council spokesperson said: "Our only role was to evaluate food handling practices at Knox Private Hospital."

"Our assessment determined that food

handling practices at the hospital were compliant.

"Knox City Council took no further part in the (Department of Health and Human Services) investigation."

ICF is suing the Department of Health and Greater Dandenong Council over what it asserts was a wrongful closure of its business.

Among its allegations is that a council officer planted a live slug during a factory inspection.

In August, a Parliamentary inquiry into the matter found the ICF closure was "valid" but "not fair".

Victoria Police is reviewing its closed investigation into the circumstances of the closure.

In 2019, Greater Dandenong Council laid 96



A picture of the slug as submitted by City of Greater Dandenong to the Parliamentary inquiry into I Cook Foods' closure.

food-safety charges against ICF – all of which were dropped just before a hearing at Dandenong Magistrates' Court in late 2019.

The council stated it aimed to avoid a legal bill of up to \$1.2 million.